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FIFTH COMMITTEE
2nd meeting
held on
Friday, 19 September 1997
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 2nd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

ELECTION OF THE VICE-CHAIRMEN

1. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to rule 103 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly and informed the Committee that the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States and the Group of Western European and Other States, respectively, had nominated Ms. Nazareth A. Incera (Costa Rica) and Ms. Erica-Irene Daes (Greece) for the posts of Vice-Chairmen. Since there were only two candidates for the two posts, if there were no objections, he would take it that the Committee wished to dispense with a secret ballot.

2. It was so decided.

3. Ms. Nazareth A. Incera (Costa Rica) and Ms. Erica-Irene Daes (Greece) were elected Vice-Chairmen by acclamation.

ELECTION OF THE RAPPORTEUR

4. The CHAIRMAN informed the Committee that the Group of African States had nominated Mr. Djamel Moktefi (Algeria) for the post of Rapporteur of the Committee. Since there were no other candidates, if there were no objections, he would take it that the Committee wished to dispense with a secret ballot.

5. It was so decided.

6. Mr. Djamel Moktefi (Algeria) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK (A/52/250)

7. The CHAIRMAN informed members of the Committee that the General Assembly had accepted, at its fourth plenary meeting, all the recommendations of the Bureau concerning the organization of the session (A/52/250). He wished to draw attention to certain of those recommendations: the fifty-second session of the General Assembly should recess not later than Tuesday, 16 December 1997; as a cost-saving measure, every effort should be made to ensure that meetings of the Main Committees adjourned by 6 p.m., that no meetings were held on weekends and that the calendar of meetings and the recommendation on the quorum required were respected. With regard to documentation, the Committee should merely take note of those reports of the Secretary-General or subsidiary organs which did not require a decision by the Assembly and should neither debate nor adopt resolutions on them, unless specifically requested to do so by the Secretary-General or the organ concerned. On matters related to the programme budget, a mandatory deadline, not later than 1 December, should be established for the submission to the Fifth Committee of all draft resolutions with financial implications; the Fifth Committee should, as a general practice, consider accepting without debate the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the financial implications of draft resolutions up to a prescribed limit, namely, $25,000 on any one item. Also, no Council, Commission or other competent body should take a decision involving either a change in the programme budget approved by the General Assembly or the

possible requirement of expenditure unless it had received and taken account of a report from the Secretary-General on the programme budget implications of the proposal.

8. He also drew the Committee's attention to General Assembly resolution 48/264 and its provisions concerning the possibility of merging certain agenda items and the biennialization and triennialization of certain items. It was also possible to consider deferring to a later session items for which decisions were not required at the main part of the current session.

9. Before reviewing its programme of work, he wished to inform the Committee that the items referred to the Fifth Committee would be the subject of a letter from the President of the General Assembly to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee, to be contained in document A/C.5/52/1. A provisional calendar of meetings was set out in an unofficial document, dated 19 September 1997, and a table had been distributed to delegations. In addition, another unofficial note on the status of the documentation of the Committee had been circulated. In view of the its heavy workload, it was important for the Committee to make optimum use of the time allotted to it. To that end, he would request the Secretariat to indicate, prior to the adoption of draft proposals, whether it would be in a position to provide the required documents, in accordance with the six-week rule, and to inform the Committee of all requests for documentation which it could not fulfil on time and from available resources. The secretariat would in due course prepare a detailed programme of work, as well as the list of documents that would be available during the first substantive meeting of the Committee, to be held on Tuesday, 30 September.

10. In conclusion, he stressed the importance of punctuality and reminded members that delegations wishing to speak on an agenda item should place their names on the list of speakers as early as possible. The list of speakers would be closed 24 hours after the start of the debate on the item in question.

11. Mr. YUSSUF (United Republic of Tanzania), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that, given its heavy workload, the Fifth Committee should first take up such priority items as the programme budget, the scale of assessments, death and disability benefits and the question of gratis personnel. The remaining items should not require extended or weekend meetings. Efforts should also be made to avoid parallel meetings, since some delegations were small in size and might therefore not be in a position to attend all meetings. For the sake of transparency, it would be preferable for all consultations, whether informal or unofficial, to be duly announced. Finally, all the necessary documentation should be made available to delegations sufficiently in advance.

12. Mr. REPASCH (United States of America) raised the issue of the general practice referred to by the Chairman according to which the Fifth Committee should consider accepting without debate the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the financial implications of draft resolutions up to a limit of $25,000 on any one item. The United States would welcome clarification of that question.

13. Mr. FARID (Saudi Arabia) said that the Secretariat should be requested to provide delegations with a statement of actual expenditures incurred in 1996, broken down by department. Such a document was essential for any serious discussion of the programme budget.

14. Mr. SIAL (Pakistan), supporting the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that it was indeed preferable not to hold night or weekend meetings. Pakistan was of the view that the Fifth Committee should consider during the current session the report on the impact of the approved savings measures on the implementation of mandated programmes and activities (A/C.5/51/53).

15. Ms. BUERGO (Cuba) said that, like other delegations, she had noted that the item on the programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997 did not appear in the programme of work. Her delegation would like the Fifth Committee to take up that item before it considered the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999. The previous July, Cuba had sought detailed information about the impact which the delay in the lifting of the freeze on recruitment and the vacancy rate had had. Her delegation believed that that issue should be taken up by the Committee. It would also be desirable to give priority consideration to the report on the impact of the approved savings measures on the implementation of mandated programmes and activities (A/C.5/51/53) and to the item of the scale of assessments, on which a decision should be taken before the end of December. If it ran out of time, the Committee could consider deferring to a later date its consideration of the question of strengthening external oversight mechanisms.

16. Mr. JESENSKY (Slovakia) hoped that the Fifth Committee would consider a matter that was still pending, namely, the inclusion of Slovakia in a group of Member States for the purpose of the apportionment of peacekeeping expenses. By its resolution 51/218 C, the General Assembly had decided, as an ad hoc arrangement, that for the period from its admission on 19 January 1993 to 31 December 1996, Slovakia should be included in the group of Member States set out in paragraph 3 (c) of resolution 43/232. But as of 1 January 1997, a solution to the matter had still not been found and the Fifth Committee should therefore take up the matter again with a view to finding a definitive solution that was acceptable to all of its members. He therefore hoped that consultations on the item would be scheduled under agenda item 142, Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations.

17. Ms. PEÑA (Mexico) said that it would be preferable to make the deadline for the closure of the list of speakers more flexible, since the direction of the debates led certain delegations to request the floor and Mexico would like to see that right preserved. She too believed that consultations or informal meetings should not be held at the same time as official meetings and that all consultations should take place on the Organization's premises, with conference services made available to the Committee in the six official languages. The working paper on the status of documentation made no mention of certain documents whose consideration, however, should have been included in the Committee's programme of work for the current session of the Assembly. That was the case for the report to which Pakistan, among other delegations, had referred

(A/C.5/51/53). The Mexican delegation was of the view that that report should be considered under agenda item 116, on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999, for which it might have certain implications. Arrangements should therefore be made for consultations to be held on the document. Consideration of that document and of the scale of assessments should be given priority. On the other hand, it was quite possible to defer to a later stage consideration of the question of the strengthening of external oversight mechanisms.

18. The CHAIRMAN said that he wished to dispel a misunderstanding. The list of speakers would only be closed 24 hours after the opening of the debate on a given agenda item. The report on the impact of approved savings measures was in fact included in the list of documents (the seventh document mentioned in connection with agenda item 115).

19. Mr. DARWISH (Egypt) joined the Mexican delegation in requesting that the report issued under the symbol A/C.5/51/53 should be considered under agenda item 116, on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999, since consideration of that report might have implications for the consideration of the proposed programme budget.

20. Mr. HALBWACHS (Controller), responding to the question raised by the United States delegation, recalled that the practice of the Fifth Committee accepting without debate the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the financial implications of draft resolutions up to a prescribed limit, namely, $25,000 on any one item, went back to the thirty-fourth session (decision 34/401). The Assembly had that morning approved the report of its Bureau and had accordingly recommended that the Fifth Committee should resume the practice.

21. The CHAIRMAN said that the suggestions made by delegations, especially those concerning the report issued under the symbol A/C.5/51/53 and the permanent inclusion of Slovakia in a group of Member States for the purpose of the apportionment of peacekeeping expenses, would be considered by the Bureau, which would take them into account when preparing the programme of work and calendar of meetings, to be made available to the Committee in six languages.

22. Mr. REPASCH (United States of America) recalled that, at the resumed fifty-first session, the United States had enquired when the Advisory Committee would complete its report on the financing of the United Nations Operation in Mozambique (agenda item 129).

23. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Advisory Committee would consider that matter and other issues relating to the financing of peacekeeping operations during the month of October and would prepare its report as soon as possible thereafter.

24. The CHAIRMAN said that agenda item 129 was scheduled to be taken up during the week of 24-28 November.

25. Ms. PEÑA (Mexico) said that the Committee's practice up to the fiftieth session had been to consider financial reports at the beginning of a session.

At the current session, however, certain reports of the Board of Auditors were scheduled to be made available only in January 1998. She wished to know whether the Board had completed the reports in question.

26. Mr. HALBWACHS (Controller) said that the change of date in the issuance of reports on peacekeeping operations was due to a change in the financial year for peacekeeping operations, which would thenceforth run from 1 July to 30 June. Accordingly, the reports were only prepared in September or October. With regard to the other reports, the question would be put to the Secretary of the Board of Auditors and the reply communicated to the Committee at its next meeting.

27. The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee accepted the provisional programme of work and the suggestions made by those delegations which had spoken on the item. The programme of work would be presented in a document which would be made available to the Committee at a later date.

28. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 4 p.m.